

H.R. 36: Addressing Sexual Harassment in the Sciences



ACTION

Representatives should cosponsor H.R. 36, the bipartisan Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act of 2019, and Senators should support the introduction of a companion bill in their chamber.

Background

A 2018 National Academies report titled “Sexual Harassment of Women” shows that sexual harassment across all fields of science has been an ongoing issue for decades.

Sexual harassment experiences typically fall into one of three categories:

- sexist gender harassment, which includes experiences that are primarily discriminatory based on one’s gender
- sexual gender harassment, which encompasses sexually explicit behavior without sexual advance
- unwanted sexual attention

A recent survey of undergraduate women in physics found that nearly 75% of respondents experienced at least one type of sexual harassment.

Impact on U.S. Scientific Enterprise: We’re Losing Talented Scientists

Female faculty in science, engineering, and medicine who experience sexual harassment report three common professional outcomes:

- Stepping down from leadership positions to avoid the perpetrator
- Leaving their institution
- Leaving their field altogether

From the National Academies report:

“While this is not the mission of this report, we note that gender discrimination itself harms women and the broader meritocracy of science.”

H.R. 36 Will Help Address the Problem

The Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act will:

- Establish an Interagency Working Group to coordinate efforts to reduce sexual harassment involving grant personnel
- Direct the NSF to award grants to institutions researching sexual harassment in the sciences with the goal of prevention and reduction
- Necessitate updates to the Academies report “On Being A Scientist: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research”

“Sexual harassment is driving some of our brightest minds away from careers in research at a time when we need them most. If we are to tackle the scientific and technological challenges ahead of us, we must do more to ensure women are free to conduct their research without being degraded, harassed, or abused because of their gender.”

–Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology